Sin and the City: A Mid-Fifteenth-Century Lament for the Fall of Athens to the 'Persians'*

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Κάθεται Ἀθήνα καὶ θρηνεῖ, κλαίει καὶ οὐκ ὑπομένει

Athens subsides and mourns and weeps, and cannot endure it.
(From the 'Lament of Athens', 26)

Τριὰ πράγματα ἐχάλασιν τὴν 'Ρωμανίαν ὅλην·
ὁ φθόνος, ἡ φιλαργυριὰ, καὶ ἡ κενὴ ἐλπίδα.

Three things destroyed all of Byzantium:
Envy, greed, and vain hope.
(From Emmanouil Georgillas, 'Lament for Constantinople', 834-835)

Introduction: The So-called 'Lament of Athens'

An intriguing Greek poem, which is preserved in a sixteenth- or early seventeenth-century manuscript kept in the former Imperial Library of St. Petersburg, is known to us as the 'Lament of Athens'. This poem of some 69 'political' verses was most likely written in the second half of the fifteenth century. Its unknown author deplores in vivid terms the fall of Athens to the 'Persians'. The lament is composed in vernacular Greek, but by a person of some education, who may or may not have been a cleric—and who may or may not have had a connection to the much lamented region of Sepolia (see below).[1] David Holton has noted that this poem displays many of the clichés of Byzantine hymnography (oral communication, 28 June 2011). Its language reveals distinct archaizing touches and its finale

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[1] This suggestion was raised early on by the Greek scholar Gabriel Destounis; Kambouroglous 1934: 27, 54-55, 89-91; Zoras 1949: 691 and also 689, who refers to Ferdinand Gregorovius 1889/1904: 2: 389-390 (in fact to the Greek translation with additions by Spyridon Lampros of Gregorovius' *Geschichte der Stadt Athen im Mittelalter*. The original German version briefly mentions the anonymous lament in 2: 382-383).

emphasizes the sinfulness that has provoked God's anger (with the Turks functioning as instruments of divine punishment) (Kambouroglous 1934: 27-28, 55).[2] This fascinating lament, which still lacks a firm attribution of authorship, adds new, mainland Greek dimensions to the old stereotype of the West versus East divide.[3] For followers of Edward Said, it may illustrate how Orientalism *avant la lettre* was performed locally in Greece in—most likely—the 1460s and 1470s in reaction firstly to the fall of Constantinople and secondly the sack of Athens by the Ottoman Turks. To argue this case (without being dictated by the theory of Orientalism of Said), I will detail the lament's rhetorical and representational tropes, which tap directly into the tradition of the classical through postclassical ekphrasis and I will also identify references to the Persian Wars and to Aeschylus' *Persians*, in particular (a context and text that, according to Said, expressed ancient Orientalism centuries before the reemergence of Orientalism). The threnody, however, not only sets up the contemporary 'Persians' as enemies of the Greeks, it also conspicuously ignores the existence of any western rule on Greek soil and it does not look to any 'crusader-style' aid.[4] In this work, performed, produced, and reproduced in a climate of hostile interaction between the Greek cities and their western occupiers, the demonic threat was perceived to come not merely from the Muslim Turks but also a potentially expanding Catholic West (which had left the nefarious legacy of the havoc wreaked in Constantinople in 1204). Thus the author of the lament mined a rich vein of binary oppositions to polarize Greeks and Muslims, while

[2] Destounis published the text of the lament in 1881 (Beck 1971: 166; Setton 1954: 314 n. 17, 315). Dimitrios Kambouroglous, the historian of Athens, adopted the text as established by Destounis (in Kambouroglous 1934: 16-17) and then added a few readings of his own to obtain a more complete and more intelligible version (1934: 154-155). My text and translation are based on the latter. Kambouroglous also provided a photostatic reproduction of the manuscript (1934, between pages 152-153). His book also includes his predecessors' readings, interpretations, and thoughts on the lament. Apart from Destounis, these predecessors include Spyridon Lampros, Ferdinand Gregorovius, Georgios Konstantinidis, Karl Krumbacher, Themistoklis Philadelpheus, Athanasios Papadopoulos Kerameus and Phaidon Koukoules. Because Kambouroglous collected so many sources and scholarly opinions, his study becomes somewhat confusing and repetitive: it is not always easy to sort out whom he is quoting, and whether he is in agreement with them or not. I refer to Kambouroglous as the main author and editor even when he cites or quotes other sources: the page numbers provided from 'Kambouroglous 1934' thus allow the reader to pursue a textual or interpretive theme throughout his work.

[3] Hans-Georg Beck's assessment is rather negative: he calls the lament's verses 'von anspruchsloser Art' (1971: 165).

[4] See Necipoğlu (2009) for a recent historical analysis of Byzantine political attitudes toward the Latins and the Ottomans in the century prior to the fall of Constantinople.

disassociating himself from the West as well. He (unlikely: she) reinforced this binarism by presenting the easterner as the quintessential sacker of the cities that symbolized civilization (Constantinople in 1453 and Athens in 1456) and by presenting the westerner as one only too eager to take the former's place.

Dimitrios Kambouroglous published the lament's full text in Greek with a commentary in 1934 and gave his book the title 'The Capture of Athens by the Saracens'. The poem's original title, however, is more telling: 'On the Destruction and the Captivity That Occurred under the Persians in Athens of Attica'. Kambouroglous identified the 'Persian' foe of the lament as the 'Saracens' and postulated a late ninth- or tenth-century invasion of Athens and Attica by the Arabs as its subject.[5] The evidence, however, points to a much later date and to an Ottoman Turkish invasion, both of which are now commonly accepted. Modern scholars agree that the event that inspired the threnody was the 1456 surrender of Athens to the Ottoman Turks, whose Sultan Mehmet II (or Mehmet the Conqueror; r. 1451-1481) had seized Constantinople only three years earlier.[6] The label 'Persian', however, to which the author of the lament resorted to depict and degrade the enemy, still stands for Moslem or Islamic, though not Arab, but Ottoman Turk. More importantly, the use of the classical reference gave the poet an opportunity to tap into a new discourse on the Ottomans by reading the current crisis and the earlier fall of Constantinople through the prism of the fifth-century BCE context of the Persian Wars. Part of

[5] Kambouroglous argued for a date of 943 for the alleged Moslem attack on Attica but wavered between that date and some time between 896 and 902 (according to Setton 1954: 314 n. 17). Oddly, Kambouroglous agreed that, based on arguments of language and style, the lament was likely to have been written in the later fifteenth century (as established by Destounis), but he postulated--rather unconvincingly--that its author was reflecting on a much earlier raid and that he was neither a a contemporary of the attack nor an Athenian (1934: 81-82, 85, 120, 131-133, 170).

[6] Setton persuasively argued the case (1954: 315, 318) against Kambouroglous (also Miles 1956: 335). Setton (1954) studied the evidence for Moslem raids in the Aegean in the ninth and tenth century, but did not think that the lament in question should be dated back to that era; rather, he confirms its relation to the 1456 events and their aftermath. Mentions of either the Saracens or the Ottomans in Athens are few and far between, even in some of the most recent diachronic histories of Greece. See, for instance, Doumanis (2010: 150-151), who, like many other historians, places the spotlight on the fall of Constantinople as the culmination of the military threats that abounded in earlier centuries. Overshadowed by the fatal loss of Constantinople, however, the loss of Athens to the Turks is traditionally mentioned in only the briefest of terms, and few of the modern secondary sources draw on the unique testimony furnished by this lament. For a brief history of Turkish rule in Athens, see Mackenzie, who also covers the events leading up to the Turkish capture of the city in 1456 (1992: 6-7).

the inspiration for the 'Lament of Athens' certainly derived from the laments for Constantinople.[7] Nonetheless, our anonymous author turned the latest disaster, that of 1456, into a new calamity: he focused the spotlight on local circumstances, which he painted with the broad rhetorical strokes of historical analogy and classical ekphrasis.

Historical Parallels

Nancy Bisaha claims that the explicit equation between Persians and Turks was not uncommon in late Byzantine times, but that it had not yet reached the level of an antagonistic worldview (2004: 60). When Athens fell to the Ottoman Turks in 1456, educated Athenians could see a sad rerun not only of the fall of Constantinople but also of the Spartan defeat at Thermopylae or of the Athenians' forced evacuation of their city and its subsequent sack by Xerxes' troops in 480 BCE. There was still hope then that both the defeat and the apparent loss of Athens might be pathways to future victories, as when the Greeks finally defeated the Persians in the naval battle of Salamis (480 BCE). The Persians' occupation of Athens failed because the Athenian general Themistocles managed to turn the military tide. The author of the fifteenth-century lament, however, does not hold out the latter, hopeful prospect. No reversal of fortune can realistically be anticipated. There is no Themistocles waiting to prove himself. The poet upholds a theocratic conception of the fate of Athens: he blames the city's disaster-provoking sinfulness and ends his threnody by invoking, not military genius, but divine help–once the signs of divine anger have abated. He is quite careful not to postulate when such a reversal of the city's fortune might come about, accepting the fact that the Ottoman Turks were in Athens to stay—as they did for decades and

[7] Bisaha explains that many laments were sung; many, too, were copied and printed, as were diatribes, tracts, tales, legends, and letters related to the fall of Constantinople (2004: 61-62). See also Philippides and Hanak, on the folk history propagated by prophecies, omens, signs, and portents (2011: 214-231). This meant that such laments could be disseminated among general audiences even long after the events. For examples of surviving laments (in Latin and in Greek) on the loss of Constantinople, see Pertusi (1976: vol. 2). The corpus of laments lends itself well to further philological studies of figures of speech and other stylistic and verbal commonalities. See also the recent contributions of Philippides (2007) and the older analysis by Dimaras (1985: 50-51). See further the volume edited by Yiannias (1991) for a sense of how the Byzantine tradition managed to survive in certain regions and areas after the fatal loss.

indeed centuries to come. Moreover the lament does not replicate that atmosphere of panic that descended on Athens after Xerxes had breached the pass at Thermopylae, of which Plutarch's *Life of Themistocles* offers a vivid description (9.4-10.4, 10.8-9). Rather the author draws inspiration from the ekphraseis of famous captured cities, in which the inhabitants remained to defend their city until the very end.

Athens fell on 4 June 1456, after the Acropolis had endured a two-year siege under Omar, Mehmet's general (Lock 1995: 329; Smith 2004: xv). That year rang in nearly four centuries of '*tourkokratia*'. In the decades prior to its fall Athens had been ruled by a prominent family from Florence, the Acciaioli (Bisaha 2004: 99, 100; Brewer 2010: 19; Lock 1995: 130-131; Ousterhout 2005: 316).[8] Even though Athens endured a long siege, the author of the lament makes it sound as if the Turks took the city by storm, after first capturing some outlying areas. Turkish retaliation against the Athenians took place shortly after the city's fall but also in repeated attacks up to 1460 (Kambouroglous 1934: 21-22, 24), which suggests that the lament is unlikely to have been written until 1460 or even later. In 1458, Mehmet himself visited the Acropolis and attempted to mentally reconstruct the classical Parthenon, which had been converted (probably as early as the sixth century) into a Christian church dedicated to the Virgin Mary (Ousterhout 2005: 294, 317).[9] The author of the threnody personifies the city of Athens as a grieving woman and mother, who appeals to the Virgin for protection and for future revenge and salvation. The Athenian surrender to the Turks meant that the Acropolis and the Parthenon,

[8] Lock explains: 'Just as the Villehardouin were associated with the history of Frankish Greece at its height, so the Acciaioli in Athens and Thebes have come to represent the last days of the Frankokratia' (1995: 130).

[9] An important source for Mehmet's visit to the Acropolis is the account of Kritovoulos of Imbros, Mehmet's Greek semi-official chronicler and biographer, who recalled:

> He saw it [the city of Athens], and was amazed, and he praised it, and especially the Acropolis as he went up into it. And from the ruins and the remains, he reconstructed mentally the ancient buildings . . . and he conjectured how they must have been originally. He noted with pleasure the respect of the inhabitants of the city for their ancestors, and he rewarded them in many ways. (1954: 136)

or rather the Great Church of the Virgin Mary, were subjected to new transformations: the Ottomans turned the Acropolis into a fortress and made it the residence of the Turkish military commander, whose garrison kept control of the entire stronghold.[10] The commander lived in the Propylaea and the Erechtheum was set aside for his harem (Mackenzie 1992: 10). Circa 1460, the Ottomans built a mosque in the Parthenon (Ousterhout 2005: 317; Smith 2004: 102). The Venetians sacked Athens in 1464 but made no attempt to seize the strongly defended Acropolis (Mackenzie 1992: 17). The author of the lament accuses the Turks of 'desecrating churches' but he does not mention the Venetian attack. However, this may not be sufficiently strong evidence to allow us to postulate a composition date for the poem between 1460 and 1464. On the other hand, the emotion that pervades the threnody may be an indicator that not many years had passed since the 1456 siege and capture of Athens.

The author of the lament does not express any explicit aversion to the 'Franks', or to the western knights of the crusades, who had established Frankish domination of Athens and of other parts of Greece and maintained strongholds throughout the eastern Mediterranean and the Levant at the expense of the indigenous populations.[11] After several centuries of religious and economic antagonism between West and East, with the memory of the Fourth Crusade and the sack of Constantinople in 1204 still fresh in Greek minds, this disassociation is not surprising.[12] Besides, if the indifferent West had not mobilized to rescue Constantinople, why would it come to the assistance of Athens? Some Greek authors branded the aggressive and exploitative westerners as 'barbarians' too and they showed similar contempt for these 'Others' as for their Moslem counterparts (Browning 2002: 272, 275; also Fleming 2003: 74, 75-76). 'Franks' was the Greeks' pejorative term for westerners, as Browning explains:

[10] Ousterhout (2005: 317). According to Mackenzie, Athens became an obscure Turkish garrison town after 1456 (1992: 10-11).
[11] Lock takes issue with the characterization of the Franks of the Aegean as 'instruments of colonial exploitation' (1995: 9), and he devotes his Chapter 10 to the complex economic aspects of the Frankish Aegean (1995: 240-265).
[12] For further background on the history of the crusades, see Setton (1969-1989).

> In Byzantine eyes the Latin [or Frank] is arrogant, greedy, untrustworthy, cruel, he is perhaps not quite a real Christian. . . .
> The westerner takes on the traditional characteristics of the barbarian—absence of order, boldness in attack but lack of staying power, brutality, and so on. (2002: 171-172)

Given this prejudice, the author of the threnody had Athens call for aid not from the West, but from the Virgin Mary, who was credited with protecting Constantinople in the crisis situations that had occurred before the fall. In other words, the author rejected the idea of crusader assistance (once the West had failed to mobilize to save Constantinople). As such, the Franks and the West are the unspoken enemies of the distraught Greeks for whom the poet speaks. But I owe the reader a closer look at what the text of the lament has to offer.

Text (Fig. 1) and Translation: 'On the Destruction and the Captivity That Occurred[13] under the Persians in Athens of Attica'

Oh the new things to behold! Oh the just verdict![14]
Oh your great forbearance, my Christ!
Your well-known verdict, which was given of old[15]
In Athens, in the great, awe-inspiring city,
The best known of all across cities and lands,
The beginning of learning and of philosophy,
With its marble glistening in the sun, the skilfully built city,
And Attica, the all-golden land, the mother of reason,

[13] The manuscript reads ἣν γέγωνεν. Holton sees this as a first sign that the scribe's syntax and spelling are uneven. My translation stays close to the original text, which is, however, hard to read or understand in many places.
[14] According to the facsimile of the manuscript, the word κρίσις is spelt κρίσης, i.e. the genitive form of the noun (Holton)..
[15] Holton identifies the manuscript reading as γεμένης and proposes a correction to γεναμένης.

The one who schooled many, from olden days until recently,

Gregory of Nazianzus, the great theologian,

Basil, [John] Chrysostom, and all the other luminaries,

Instructing them in every skill of (written) knowledge, both the indigenous knowledge and that from outside.[16]

I will begin this narration of mine from the present time,

Telling of the destruction and the captivity

That was inflicted on her [the city] by the Persian race,[17]

The offspring, the utterly impious one, of Ham, the cursed son.[18]

To begin with, they captured the area of Legourio,

Secondly and thirdly, they came[19] to this very place,

They killed the priests worshipping the Creator,[20]

The wise elders and their entire council,

For all sorts of things of the mind and body;

They set fire to the houses with all their wealth.

They desecrated the churches,[21] they defiled the icons;

They violated and raped the women contrary to nature,

They forced themselves onto most of the boys.

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[16] On this interpretation that stresses the blending of Christian and pagan learning, see Kambouroglous (1934: 13, 57).

[17] The word πέρσικὸν in the manuscript has two accents. Holton sees this and other spelling errors as signs of carelessness on the part of the scribe. Another scribal error follows in line 17: λεγουρικοῦ τοῦ μέρος.

[18] The Hamites or descendants of Ham, one of Noah's sons, were believed to include the prophet Mohammed. The Biblical story of the cursing of Ham and his son can be found in *Genesis* 9:20-27.

[19] The manuscript reads ἤλθασιν, with a final ν (Holton).

[20] Kambouroglous suggested τοῦ Πλάστου for the uncertain line ending (1934: 154).

[21] Holton suggests that the questionable manuscript reading ἐμοίωσαν could possibly be a corruption of ἐμίαναν or ἐρήμωσαν: 'they left [the churches] deserted'. Kambouroglous, however, adopted ἐμίωσαν and saw in it an alternative aorist form of μιαίνω (1934: 38). This alternative form (possibly from a verb μιώνω), however, may not exist. A problematic ἐμύωσαν (re)occurs at the beginning of the next line. Holton proposes ἐβίασαν as a potentially correct reading there.

Athens [Athína] subsides and mourns and weeps, and cannot endure it:

'Oh miserable me, oh wretched me,

Oh me, more sinful than the others:

Oh me, zealous of old and full of envy,

Oh me, the target of taunts among all the cities,

From of old the most famous[22] of all the cities,

Which had never stooped to slavery in any way,

The ever-manly one throughout the whole world,

The wise one,[23] the all-wise one among all the cities,

The one full of peoples like a swarm of bees.

Woe is me that I have been ruined for the whole world to see,

And that I have become a laughing stock to all my neighbours:[24]

I used to have them at my feet, but now they're trampling on my head.

How can I speak of my inconsolable pains?

They cut off[25] my feet, that is to say, Legourio[26]

They broke my shoulder,[27] along the road leading into the *demos*.[28]

They made my heart ache for the people of Sepolia!'

Again and again Athens [Athína] beats her chest and laments:

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[22] Ms. παφούμιστον (or -ην) (Holton).
[23] The manuscript has the vernacular form τὴν φρένιμον (Holton).
[24] Ms. γειτονέων μου (Holton).
[25] Ms. ἐκώψανσιν (Holton).
[26] Ms., with dittography: ἤγουν ταλεταλεγουρια, which must be interpreted as τὰ Λεγουρία (Holton).
[27] Ms. εἰσάθαλσαν τὸν νόμον μου ('they invaded my district'--though technically νομόν). Holton proposes the reading τὸν νῶμον ('shoulder') for τὸν νόμον, which continues the author's rhetorical play on parts of the body.
[28] On this incomprehensible reading of δροκάτων καταδείμου found in the manuscript, see Kambouroglous (1934: 32, 39, 64-69, 78, 100-106, 169). A place name is needed. Kambouroglous favoured the δρόμον τὸν κατὰ δῆμον, 'the road leading into the demos', which I have tentatively adopted here.

‘Oh my dear people of Sepolia, what have they done to you!

Oh the most famous farmers in the entire world,

Whom I held in high repute and praise throughout my entire state,

The ones who provided my state with every staple food,

Who lived in freedom and in great joy

Now they are being called slaves and are herded off to Persia!’

Again Athens [Athina] wails from deep inside:

‘My most beautiful trees,[29] and who will water you now?

Who will beat that ripe harvest of yours off the trees?

Who will make the olive oil, the finest in the world,

The one that lights the lamps that disperse the darkness?

Oh, the paradise-like delights, and who will enjoy you now?[30]

Oh, my renowned fields, who will harvest you now?

Oh my fertile land, who will sow you?

The farmers were seized by the Persian race

And they left you despoilt of everything.

My golden life, ornamented and adorned:

And you, too, Sepolia, full of harvest . . .

Oh miserable me, oh wretched me,

[no temple] … and my head with its small backbone[31]

And they fill me with fear that they will destroy[32] it [my head].

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[29] Holton proposes the spelling Δέντρη for Δέντρι. See also Kambouroglous (1934: 39).

[30] Holton accepts the reading γεργεύη but does not rule out that the scribe was using a shortened form of γεωργεύη, ‘cultivate’.

[31] Most sources identify this head as the city of Constantinople. Kambouroglous, however, identifies it as the Acropolis and its small fortification to the North (1934: 80, 116-117, 170). Holton calls the line a *locus desperandus*.

All[33] of that I suffered because of the lawlessness,

The many injustices,[34] and the illegalities.[35]

And you, the immaculate [Mother of Christ], the pure one in your city of Athens,[36]

Avenge your city, the humble Athens,

And free your people from the power of Persia'.

Topoi through Time: Athens Subjected to Ekphrasis

At best this 'Lament of Athens' has been discussed as a historical source, though never as a poem that follows the classical and postclassical rules of the ekphrasis or a detailed description of the siege and capture of a city.[37] Ruth Webb lists the *topoi* that add to the emotional effect of the capture of a city (according to Quintilian, *Institutio oratoria* 8.3.67-69): 'the flames, the collapsing roofs, the flight and lamentation of the inhabitants' (2009: 91). The most frequently cited example of an enemy's destruction of a city among the rhetoricians writing on the subject of ekphrasis is Demosthenes' (brief) description of the fate of Phocis (*De fals. leg.* 65.361) (Webb 2009: 74, 142). An older model with tremendous medieval resonance and tenacity is, however, the *Ilioupersis*, or the literary and artistic theme of the fall of Troy (Paul 1982: 145).[38] Our anonymous author's knowledge of the ancient literary treatments that had been rediscovered about the recent topic of Constantinople's loss merits special analysis. A closer

[32] Ms. κατελύσουν (?) (Holton).

[33] There is no καὶ at the beginning of this line in the manuscript (Holton).

[34] Holton suggests that στολίας might be a corruption of πολλὰς but notes that the manuscript does not show traces of an initial letter π. See also Kambouroglous, who referred to the latter reading (1934: 40) but did not modify the text he adopted from Destounis.

[35] Ms. παραρομίας (?) (Holton).

[36] For this reading, see Kambouroglous (1934: 15).

[37] On *ekphraseis* of cities or the destruction of cities, see Aslanov (2009); Paul (1982); and Webb (2009: 72-74, 91, 142, 148-149, 159, and passim).

[38] Aslanov discusses the processes of rhetorical and poetic exaggeration, amplification, and stereotyping related to the older topoi of the capture of such ancient cities as Troy, Jerusalem, Carthage, Phocis and Thebes: these processes expand on what may have been a nucleus of eyewitness truth, and the ensuing net of intertextual borrowings jeopardizes any claim of authenticity. But Aslanov also states: 'the intertext may also dignify the eyewitnessed or fleshwitnessed suffering by anchoring it in literary or scriptural tradition' (2009: 170).

examination of their stock ingredients and also of the lament's unique structure may help to bring out what is qualitatively different and therefore perhaps more significant in this particular poem.

In the opening lines (ll.1-12) of the threnody, the author identifies Athens as a city subject to Christ's judgement but also as the locus of ancient pagan culture, which has been enriched by centuries of Christian writing. The prologue emphasizes that Athens is a revered seat of classical learning, reason, and philosophy, which has architectural treasures on offer and can also boast of having nurtured three of the most important Fathers of the Church, the Three Hierarchs of Greek Orthodoxy: Gregory of Nazianzus or Gregory the Theologian, Basil the Great, and [John] Chrysostom.[39] Thus the city's ancient and subsequent Christian legacies had blended, to generate a harmonious environment that exalted the past, pagan and Early Christian alike, and that fostered learning and the art of writing. Whereas nostalgia for a city's vanished splendour is a common trait of the ancient through late antique ekphrasis (Aslanov 2009: 174), the emphasis on the loss of Byzantine learning is less common. In fact, this only became a recurring component in the laments for the fall of Constantinople, which were no doubt fresh in the author's mind. In his dismay at the destruction of books and art treasures during the sack of Constantinople, Aeneas Silvius Piccolomini (1405-1464), a high-ranking mid-fifteenth-century cleric and humanist, who composed some of the most eloquent laments on the fall of 'the City', pointedly stated: 'Xerxes and Darius, who once afflicted Greece with great disasters, waged war on men, not letters' (quoted by Bisaha 2004: 67). Thus the topos of the loss of Byzantine cultural patrimony is an important indicator of both changing times and places, especially when it supplements the stock-in-trade narrative components that describe a captured city.

The fall of Constantinople was the watershed event that generated the rhetoric and imagery that portrayed the Ottoman Turks as the new 'barbarian' menace both to the 'Greco-Roman concepts of

[39] See Kambouroglous (1934: 13, 26-27) and Zoras (1949: 689), referring to Ferdinand Gregorovius (1889/1904: 2: 389-390).

civility' and to the Christian faith (Bisaha 2004: 62). It crystallized a veritable 'discourse' on the Turks (Bisaha 2004: 60, 62). In 1456, or the year of Athens' capture, the same Aeneas Silvius, by then a cardinal, commissioned a work on the origins of the Turks, which concluded that the Turks should be linked to the ancient Scythians at the expense of their presumed Trojan ancestry (Hankins 1995: 137; also Bisaha 2004: 68). This became a long-lived identification, which was later expanded to make kindred races of the Scythians, the Saracens and the Turks, and to turn them all into historical enemies of the Greco-Roman civilization (Hankins 1995: 137-138, 142).

Lines 13-16 shed light on the poet's motivation for composing the threnody and invite elaboration on the above mentioned, politically motivated identifications of the Ottoman Turks: 'to tell of the destruction and the captivity that was inflicted on Athens by the "Persian race"'. In a generalizing flourish, the author calls the Turks, or his 'Persians', the offspring of Mohammed, thus emphasizing their Moslem faith. The question of the identity of the Turks preoccupied the humanists (Hankins 1995: 135-144) but, over time, some answers prevailed: the Turks, as reincarnations of the pagan Persians, became synonymous with the new non-Christian force: Islam (Hall 2006: 211). Many westerners also made a second Mohammed of Mehmet (Hankins 1995: 142). The Latin term *Turci* had long been used to refer to the Seljuk Turks, who preceded the Ottoman Turks. At the beginning of the fourteenth century, however, when the West first encountered the latter, the term *Turci* continued to be used in addition to the classical Greek term *Persai* (Πέρσαι) (Hankins 1995: 136). Some early humanists muddied the waters by referring to the Turks as *Teucri* or descendants of the Trojans (Spencer 1954: 8-12). According to Terence Spencer, medieval sentiment generally favoured the Trojans over the Greeks--a testimony to the literary and ideological strength of (the reception of) Vergil's *Aeneid* (1954: 9, 33-34).[40] Thus several authors justified the fall of Constantinople in 1453 as the historical retribution

[40] On the nuances of Western and Eastern identification with the Trojans in the aftermath of the Fourth Crusade, see Shawcross (2003).

exacted by the Trojans/ Persians/ Turks from the Greeks (Hall 2006: 221 and 2007: 177). The 'elegant substitution of *Teucri* for the barbarous medieval *Turci*' exerted a profound influence (Hankins 1995: 136; also Bisaha 2004: 56, 58). Indeed, the equation familiarized, 'domesticated', or even glorified the Turks and thus reduced the power of their threat (in the words of Hankins 1995: 141). 'It link[ed] the Turks to a noble, ancient people regarded as the ancestors of the Romans', Bisaha concurs (2004: 56). In the 1450s, the terminology was further politicized: in 1453, Aeneas Silvius claimed that '[t]hose who are now called Turks ('*Turchi*') are not, as some think, the Trojans or the Persians' (Hankins 1995: 137; also Bisaha 2004: 63-64, 67, 68). In 1454, he called on the German princes to form a (crusader-style) league against the Turks (Schnapp 1996: 114-118, 340). As Pope Pius II (from 1458 on), he continued to argue fervently against the use of '*Teucri*' (Hankins 1995: 137, 140, 141). Indeed, many saw the danger of positing that the Turks as descendants of the Trojans were entitled to Constantinople as a successor state to Troy (with the Turks also avenging the Persian losses in the Persian Wars and the ultimate Persian defeat at the hands of Alexander the Great).[41] In 1471, Cardinal Bessarion became one of the most influential contemporaries to draw an analogy between the Byzantine theatre of war and the ancient Greek defence against the Persian aggressors (Hankins 1995: 116-117, 120, 138)—a parallel that prevailed right up to the Greek War of Independence.[42] By the time of the first military successes of the

[41] Mehmet the Conqueror himself knew of this powerful identification of the Turks with the Trojans (Hankins 1995: 139, 140). When he visited the site of Troy a few years after the fall of Constantinople, he observed (according to Kritovoulos):

> It was the Greeks and Macedonians and Thessalians and Peloponnesians who ravaged this place in the past, and whose descendants have now through my efforts paid the just penalty, after a long period of years, for their injustice to us Asiatics at that time and so often in subsequent times. (1954: 181-182)

Xerxes, too, had championed the East's revenge for the fall of Troy (Haubold 2007: 47-63). See also Philippides and Hanak for a recent, comprehensive discussion of the view of Constantinople as Troy's successor (2011: 193-214).

[42] See Bessarion's *Orationes ad principes Christianos adversus Turcos* of 1471 in *Aulae Turcicae descriptio*, part 2, 315-372 (introduced by Hankins 1995: 117-118). James Hankins, who studied the humanist crusading literature that flared up after the fall of Constantinople and that was composed almost entirely by Italians, noted among the topoi of this literature: the theme of the just war or of war sanctioned by (typically) divine authority and by Christian prejudices against Islam (1995: 118-119). In addition to these topoi, the Greek revolt against the Turks of 1821 inspired a sense of Europe's indebtedness toward the enslaved Greeks (Spencer 1954: 22). Spencer also observed, however, that the Europeans' view of the Greeks' apathy and

1820s, the Greek rebels could see the fall of Constantinople or of the doomed city as the Thermopylae of their Byzantine forebears, whose 'sacrifice' inspired future generations and made later victories over the Turks possible.

In lines 17-25 the author of the threnody outlines the main elements of the historical disaster that the Turks inflicted upon Athens and, before their advance on the city, on some of the outlying areas (the enigmatic Legourio being one of them).[43] He does so, however, by following the rhetorical patterns of the ekphrasis, which require a vivid description of how priests (in this case, Christian priests) and elders had been slaughtered, homes and possessions ransacked and given over to the flames, temples (or, churches and icons) desecrated and women and boys raped. This is a relatively succinct depiction of the mayhem that typically ensues after the fall of a city, and the author chose to emphasize the inhabitants' inability to protect their land, their families, and their religious symbols. This triptych of fatherland, family, and religion reminds the classically educated reader, who has been warned to look out for allusions to the Persian Wars thanks to the poet's unequivocal branding of the Turks as Persians, of some of the core lines of Aeschylus' *Persians*.[44] The literary references to the *Persians* 402-405 or to the Greeks' martial song, which they chanted while successfully attacking the Persian fleet at Salamis, probably did not escape the attention of the alert reader.[45] Our threnody, then, may be the little known

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their belief that Greek bondage was a just revenge for the Trojan War 'provided some salve to the conscience of Western Europe' in abandoning a Christian people to the 'infidel' oppressors (1954: 12). Andrew Vincent places the origins of the concept of a 'just war' in the twelfth century, and he acknowledges the pervasive influence of religious language. He explains how religious memorials, thanksgivings, and formal recognition of the war dead still testify to this concept's impact on state theory (2002: 126-127).

[43] Kambouroglous devoted a good deal of attention to the various attempts to identify Legourio (1934: 11-13, 20-21, 29, 30, 40, 41-43, 44-48, 49-51, 77-78, 97-99, 169). Legourio may have been a village or area near Athens and is less likely to be identified as the village near Epidaurus.

[44] I leave aside the ideological connotations that the triptych of fatherland, religion, and family acquired in twentieth-century Greek reactionary circles and in the framework of state anti-communism.

[45] The medieval and Byzantine tradition of Aeschylus' *Persians*, however, is nearly impossible to document beyond the history of the textual transmission and the fierce anti-Muslim ideology espoused by the—no less fierce and cruel—western crusaders. See Hall (2007: 174-178) on the history of Aeschylus' *Persians* from Byzantium to the Renaissance. Hall's chapter, entitled 'Aeschylus' *Persians* via the Ottoman Empire to Saddam Hussein', in *Cultural Responses to the Persian Wars: Antiquity to the Third Millennium* (2007), incorporates a diachronic study of the uses and abuses of the tragedy (the chapter's header retains the earlier title 'Aeschylus' *Persians* and Images of Islam', 2007: 167-199). The authors and editors

link in a tradition that kept the enmity towards the East alive and even sharpened it well before the humanists' full rediscovery of Aeschylus' corpus.[46] It added a concise but very important piece of evidence, quite different from any of the extant manuscripts or early modern translations and stage adaptations of the *Persians*. But we would need a concatenation of these kinds of Byzantine through Renaissance sources as well as the studies that analyze them and put them in the spotlight, to posit a solid chain of continuity from antiquity to the modern era and even right up to the present day.

Aeschylus' battle-cry was reported by the Persian messenger to the Persian court (overlooking the classical dramatic convention that all the Persian characters be played by Greek actors):

> ὦ παῖδες Ἑλλήνων, ἴτε
> ἐλευθεροῦτε πατρίδ', ἐλευθεροῦτε δὲ
> παῖδας γυναῖκας θεῶν τε πατρώιων ἕδη
> θήκας τε προγόνων· νῦν ὑπὲρ πάντων ἀγών
>
> O, sons of the Greeks,
> free your fatherland, free
> your children, your wives, the temples of your fathers' gods,
> and the tombs of your ancestors! Now the struggle is for all. (*Persians* 402-405)

This exhortation offers a timeless model of the areas of territorial invasion, religious and family and the gender violation to which any besieged population may be vulnerable. Aeschylus' play of 472

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of *Cultural Responses* revisit a wide gamut of classical sources and shed light on the post-Renaissance appropriations of Aeschylus' tragedy and the Persian Wars in general, arranging the chapters that treat landmark texts through the ages in roughly chronological order. Thus they imply a continuous tradition in the reception of Aeschylus' *Persians* and attitudes to the Persian Wars.

[46] The Aldine Press in Venice published the *editio princeps* (first printed edition) of Aeschylus in 1518. In 1555, the publication in Basel of an important Latin translation followed: *Aeschyli poetae vetustissimi tragoediae* (*Tragedies of the Oldest Poet Aeschylus*) by Jean Saint-Ravy. The Renaissance West rediscovered the dramatist primarily through this influential translation (Garland 2004: 192, 202; Hall 2007: 175). By the time of the Renaissance rediscovery, the *Persians* had earned a place in Aeschylus' Byzantine triad, but the dramatist remained less popular than either Euripides or Sophocles. Scholarship on Aeschylus then developed rather slowly in the later sixteenth and seventeenth century. In the second half of the seventeenth century, however, Aeschylus became more available in modern languages and, a century later, important text editions and French translations were in general circulation (Grell 1995: 1: 102 and n. 187; Hall 2006: 221-222 and 2007: 174-175, 179). Shelley and his circle and also exponents of the French Revolution and Restoration redefined Aeschylus' *Persians* as a charter myth for the Greek War of Independence (see Beaton's contribution in this volume).

BCE, however, brought specific historical reality to the theatre space, because the signs of destruction were visible immediately beyond the physical stage of the theatre of Dionysus. The tragedy depicted loss, which was, nonetheless, tinged with a note of Greek triumph, as in this exhortation. The themes of the lament, then, recall the famous martial song from the *Persians*: they stress the legitimate motivation of a just war, that is, of a war for the right, clearly-articulated causes of fatherland, religion, and family. By 1821, the Greeks had linked the purple passage from Aeschylus to the ethos of the national body and its time-hallowed traditions, and they promulgated it widely (Van Steen 2010: 118-125). The author of the lament presents territorial defence and the defence of the family and religion as matters in which the Athenians have long held personal as well as historical stakes. A defeat, then, in such a justified war could only be the result of God's anger against a people that had ignored divine calls for repentance. The threnody enumerates all acts of Turkish cruelty and of Greek suffering, while focusing on exactly those realms that, according to Aeschylus' exhortation, the Greeks have from time immemorial most wanted to protect.

In line 26, the author introduces the personified city of Athens, the sinful but now mourning Athens or 'Athína', who breaks out in a first, prolonged lament (27-42) over the loss of her reputation, prestige, and freedom but also over her current lack of courage and wisdom. In her misfortune, Athína acts as the poet's muse, for nearly two-thirds of the entire lament. The author now refocuses the threnody to express the strong emotions of the personified speaker and thus to amplify the theme of the city's capture. Athens, painfully depleted of its industrious people, has now been prostrated for the whole, gleeful world to see. The enemy even knew how to attack the city's very heart, the prime agricultural area of Sepolia, an Athenian suburb near the site of Plato's Academy. The Turks deported

the talented, highly renowned farmers of Sepolia to Anatolia (49, 58), where they expected them to replicate their agricultural successes as slaves of the Ottomans.[47]

The mention of Sepolia strikes a special chord of agony. The author of the threnody, which is technically about the fall of Athens, lets Athína bewail the hapless Sepoliates for another eighteen lines (43-61). The lament for a besieged city becomes a lament for a depleted rural area. The theme of the foe herding off their captive victims like livestock (49, 58) is another key ingredient of the ekphrasis (Aslanov 2009: 173). So, too, is the sequence of rhetorical questions punctuated by the opening pronoun τίς; ('who?') (51-57). The sequence's viewpoint, which is more prospective than retrospective (Aslanov 2009: 183), brings it home to the reader or listener that absolutely none of the farmers is left to tend to the fields, the orchards, and especially the olive groves of Sepolia. The author has adapted the typical motif of the separation of parents from their children in the fray of an enemy invasion into the pitiful image of farmers forcibly separated from their lands.

In lines 62-64, Athína confesses to her own sin of lawlessness, which she posits as the cause of the city's current and possibly future sufferings (65-66). In the closing lines (67-69), she invokes the vengeance but also the hoped-for protection of the Virgin. Thus the poet has placed the justified defence of land, family, and religion under Christian auspices, with all the attendant references to grief, fear, and pain (though not – or a least not to the same extent – to prayer or repentance). He has also drawn up the guilt-laden plot of a recognizable morality play about possible redemption through torment and sacrifice. The combination of the stock elements of the classical through late antique ekphrasis with these Christian layers and accretions makes it hard to gauge to what extent this lament was a genuine threnody or a mere performative utterance (of the type known as a dirge). Also, it leaves the question open as to what really happened to Athens in the disaster of 1456 and its aftermath. Was Athens left in a state from which it could barely recover? Most likely not, and many of the traces of the destruction probably

[47] For more information on Sepolia/Sopolia, see Kambouroglous (1934: 62-64, 108-110).

vanished in the ensuing decades. Reinhold Lubenau, an East Prussian traveller who visited Athens in the 1580s, i.e. about a century later, encountered a multicultural, industrious, and probably prosperous town. He observed:

> [Athens] is still very large and passably built; Greeks, Jews, Turks and some Italians live there, and the Italian language is commonly spoken. From the countryside which surrounds the town, and was once called Attica, comes much silk, cotton, galls and fine wax, which the Venetians prefer to others because it can be bleached so well; it is otherwise yellowish; and the honey the ancient Greeks considered the world's best medication, calling it Attic honey.[48]

Conclusion

Even though the 'Lament of Athens' belongs to the same cultural and literary horizon as the contemporary laments over the fall of Constantinople, its narrative brings new nuances to the confrontation between the West, Greece and the East, or between Roman Catholicism, Byzantine Orthodoxy and Islam. Catholicism and crusader-style western assistance were no longer viable options for the author. Literary references further extended the poem's significance beyond the echoes of recent history and took the reader or listener back into ancient Greek culture: Aeschylus' classic legitimation of the defensive war still had validity for the author, who reiterated the Greek concerns eternalized in the famous exhortation. The stock elements of the ekphrasis of a captured city, the typical Christian drama of sin and absolution and the analogical framework of the Persian Wars merged to provide a literary and historical template for the poet in which to describe Athens' mid-fifteenth-century demise at the hands of the Ottoman Turks. This blending of cultural layers gives the lament a significance that matches the political importance of the actual events.

[48] Quoted and translated by Manthos (2008: 52), who dates this testimony to 1587.

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